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ABSTRACT

Career planning by new professors is discussed, based on recent studies. Productivity seems to be related to how a professor uses resources, including time. In 1981, work experiences of new education professors, were surveyed with attention to the amount of time they spent working and the kinds of work they did. Six kinds of work were identified: teaching, administrative and service tasks, research and scholarly tasks, personal professional development, work with students, and curriculum development. A 2-year followup survey of the professors revealed two patterns of blueprints, based on the specifications of time and work tasks. One pattern consisted of involvement on a fairly equal basis in each of the six clusters of work, while the second pattern showed an uneven distribution among the work tasks. A characteristic of the preferred balanced design was that no particular cluster was given much greater time allocation than the others. A characteristic of the preferred unbalanced design was that research and scholarship or teaching clusters took priority over administration and service, work with individual students, personal professional development, and curriculum development. (SW)

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Blueprints for Academic Lives

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Imagine for a little while that you could gain control of your work and do what you please. That you could select the activities that you most want to engage in. That you could apportion your time as you see fit. That you could control the expectations, the pressures, and the rewards that make up the world which you encounter daily. How would you redesign your work? Would it be different in many ways? Would it be different at all? What would your newly created work world look like? Would you pursue greater productivity, greater security, greater satisfaction, greater variety?

Marking Specifications

In higher education, professors have traditionally been challenged to create their own work worlds. Given flexible time, resource support, and scholarly atmosphere, they have had both opportunity and obligation to perform the many tasks that make up the professorial role. How they design their work world--the kinds and quantities of tasks they include--comprises, in a sense, the specifications of their blueprints for academic life.

What specifications professors include in their own plans is a concern for both institutions and individuals. The University of Washington evidenced such a concern in a 1971 study of their own faculty (Thompson, 1971). The title question, "How does the faculty spend its time?" focuses on one major dimension of academic life. The report also establishes a range of professorial activities, and the bearing these two dimensions have on faculty productivity. What specifications a professor marks for the blueprint which will guide the building of an academic life, and to what extent these specifications lead to productivity has

been the focus of studies in recent years too. For example, Creswell, Barnes, and Wendell (1982) identified strong relationships between productivity and primary interest in doing research. But the nature of productivity in higher education awaits clearer delineation. Productivity is larger than numbers of articles and books, and strong argument has been made that it even includes "increased academic competence" (Reagan, 1982). Whatever the measure of productivity, it seems reasonable that it be related to how a professor uses resources, including time.

David Riesman (1959) pointed out some time ago that having the freedom to set one's own goals and work toward them was not only characteristic of the professorial career, but was a chief attraction of that worklife. But setting one's own goals must be done in an institutional context. Bean (1982) examined 14 studies and developed a causal model of faculty research productivity relating to both individuals and institutions. The twenty propositions undergirding the model related variables such as institutional emphasis on research, institutional autonomy, undergraduate teaching responsibilities, and individual need for personal growth to individual research productivity. Hendrickson (1982) also marked the relationship between institutional press and individual careers; the five issues cited could raise the question, "To what degree will professors be able to draft their own career plans?"

Recently, professors in the field of education were surveyed regarding their work experiences (Myers and Mager, 1981). These professors were different in that they were new to professorial work, having graduated recently from fourteen institutions prominent in graduate

study in education. Two dimensions--the amount of time they spent working and the kinds of work they did—were studied. Six kinds of work were identified from the data; generally, most new professors reported that (1) teaching and (2) administrative and service tasks were the predominant work clusters. Other professorial tasks included clusters under (3) research and scholarly tasks, (4) personal professional development, (5) work with students, and (6) curriculum development. These new professors of education were drafting their academic blueprints with six major specifications.

Blueprints-in-Use

Myers and Mager followed-up their initial survey approximately two years later, to study how the professorial careers of these new graduates were unfolding. The information the respondents provided allowed the development of two patterns of blueprints, based on the specifications of time and work tasks.

The two patterns contrasted those professors who involve themselves on a fairly equal basis in each of the six clusters of work with those whose work is not nearly so evenly distributed. (A difference of 28 percent or more between any of the work clusters for a professor was the criterion used.) One-fifth of the professors were placed in the former group and they were said to have "balanced" blueprints. The latter group, four-fifths of the professors, were said to have "unbalanced" blueprints for academic life.

An effort[1] was made to identify further commonalities among the professors with similar blueprints. The blueprints were grouped: all

the blueprints with actual balanced designs were overlaid, as were all the blueprints with actual unbalanced designs. The questions of interest were: within the two groups are there similar emphases on work clusters? Are there similar preferences? Do professors who have similar blueprints work at similar institutions? Does faculty status seem to be related to the patterns? And so on. But this overlaying of the blueprints did not yield further commonalities. It seemed that having a balance or unbalanced blueprint was unrelated to other characteristics of the work context.

The follow-up study also asked the new professors to describe how they would reapportion their time if they could. It was evident from their responses that some professors were content with the present pattern in their blueprints; some would make minor modifications in the design; and others would make major changes. Two-thirds of the professors, regardless of whether their actual patterns were balanced or unbalanced, kept similarly balanced or unbalanced preferred patterns. That is, most professors like their current patterns, and would maintain some variation on them in their preferred academic blueprint.

To extend the analysis further, the blueprints were organized into sets according to the preferred designs. Again, though no widespread commonalities were found within the two sets of blueprints, one point of uniformity within the groups became evident.

Blueprints with preference for balanced design. Two-fifths of the professors were in this group. Characteristic of the preferred balanced design is that no particular cluster is given much greater time allocation than the others. Professors who use these blueprints

would like to work at all of the kinds of professorial tasks without immoderate emphasis on any one. This pattern was developed even though these same professors recognized and reported that their institutions had priorities among teaching, research, and service missions. Very frequently these professors would not have set their priorities in concert with the priorities they recognized as held by their institutions.

Blueprints with preference for unbalanced design. Three-fifths of the professors were in this group. Characteristic of the preferred unbalanced design is that research and scholarship or teaching clusters take priority over administration and service, work with individual students, personal professional development, and curriculum development. Professors who use these blueprints would like to emphasize one of these two clusters with less attention to the other kinds of work. Unlike the professors who preferred a balanced design, these professors seem to have a good sense of the relative value of teaching and research and scholarship in their institutions. Not only do they recognize the institutional priorities, but they set their preferred designs in concert with them.

Drafting an Academic Life

Though having opportunity to design their own work world might seem attractive, such an undertaking is not without its perils. As new professors set their initial designs for professorial work, they may not suffer the constraints of established roles and expectations as might seasoned professors, but neither do they enjoy a clear sense of direction for designing their work world. New professors may be industrious

and committed to particular tasks, while their institutions may value different tasks. Subtle and overt pressures of the institution impose restraints on their planning. The designed life, once lived, may not be as satisfying as anticipated. A design may prove too rigid for adaptation to career developments and opportunities. As new professors begin life in academe, the blueprints they draft must overcome such hazards.

The contrasted blueprints described above provide the basis for an important observation. Given the opportunity to draft their specifications as they would prefer, some new professors of education would do so more in concert with their institutions' priorities. Others seem much less inclined to do so. Certainly, the ability of new professors to draw some parallel between their own preferences and the institutions' perceived priorities is a marker of eventual reward or security. Blueprints which are designed without such attention may be poorer guides for new professors.

Baldwin and Blackburn (1981) described stages of career development for professors. They state that work specifications within the career change as the professor moves through five levels of experience. Their work suggests that patterns set early in the career will very likely be changed as the career unfolds. To arrive at the descriptions, they emphasized commonality among the professors at each level, rather than variance. That variance among the experiences of professors at a given level is important, seems evident from the present survey data, at least in regard to new professors in education. The importance is underscored by the work of Braskamp, Fowler, and Ory (1982), who found that "the

professional life of a professor is largely accumulative." That is, patterns set early in the career had a sustained effect long afterwards. This finding is reconcilable with that of Baldwin and Blackburn, given a broader view of the issues, but it emphasizes the impact of the early career stages on that which follows.

New professors have both the opportunity and the obligation to draft their own blueprints for professorial work. A major determinant of how their work worlds will develop is how they spend their time: what emphasis they give to each work cluster of academic life. While the various blueprints in use may be good guides for professorial work, they probably lead to different kinds of productivity; they provide for different degrees of variety; and they may lead to different kinds of satisfaction. As new professors draft blueprints for use in building their academic world, they should be aware to what ends the plans are likely to take them, and how these ends match personal and institutional measures of success.

Notes

[1]A more minute examination was first attempted, in which blueprints that held similar patterns and changes in patterns were grouped. For example, "balanced but preferring unbalanced" workload, "unbalanced and preferring the same" workload, were among the groups made. Six describable sets and two additional, logically possible sets were formed.

This grouping of the blueprints into sets provided some observations on professors' work worlds. First, professors' blueprints fall into all conceivable sets though some clearly predominate. Second, there are distinctive differences among the sets: some professors' work worlds are noticeably different from others'. The specifications of administrative and service tasks, research and scholarship, and teaching are important points of contrast among the blueprints. Finally, these groups don't seem to be particularly related to institutional characteristics. Though this grouping of the blueprints was reasonable and had to be done to be able to make these observations, the groups were not keenly enough different to be worked with further.

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